

VZCZCXRO9648
PP RUEHLMC
DE RUEHTG #1063/01 3301855
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 251855Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8926
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//CINC/POLAD//
RUMIAAA/USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC 0834
RHMFIUU/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHDC
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 001063

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [MARR](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO HONDURAS' MOSQUITIA COAST

11. Summary. On 12 Nov, the Ambassador visited Puerto Lempira, in the Gracias a Dios region of Honduras accompanied by the Honduran Minister of Health (MoH), Vice Minister of Education (VMoE) and 20 media. The purpose of the visit was to 1) inaugurate USG-funded school facilities, 2) inaugurate a USG-funded hyperbaric treatment chamber at a local clinic, 3) visit the USG-funded "American Corner" internet library facility and the site of US-donated relief supplies, and 4) visit a nearby Honduran Navy base set to receive U.S. counter-drug construction funds. The visit provided an opportunity to reach out to a strategically important region. Its vast uncontrolled areas are host to active drug trafficking bands. Our efforts to reach out and provide assistance to the community afforded us favorable nationwide media coverage of our support for one of the more remote and marginalized communities of Honduras. This visit underscores the commitment of the Honduran and U.S. governments to the Gracias a Dios region and our partnership in the fight against illicit drugs. End summary.

School Inauguration

12. Two grade schools and a kindergarten facility were built in Puerto Lempira using approximately USD 450,000 of US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP) funds. The Ambassador inaugurated the three schools at the site of "La Fraternidad" School, and conducted a press conference on the site. Gracias a Dios is a region that has historically suffered some of the lowest literacy and school attendance rates in Honduras. USG efforts to build and enhance schools offer great positive potential for the region and the U.S. image there. During the press conference, the Ambassador also emphasized that improving education will help fight against drug trafficking among youth.

Hyperbaric Chamber Inauguration

13. The Gracias a Dios region has approximately 8,000 divers who work during the lobster/fishing season each year with 20 or more suffering dive-related injuries each season, mostly due to failure to follow safe diving practices, such as limiting the time and depth of dives and controlling the rate of ascent. The USG-funded hyperbaric chamber is designed to treat Decompression Sickness (aka "the Bends") and gas embolisms resulting from such unsafe practices. The chamber is also useful for non-diving medical applications such as a burn treatment. The chamber cost approximately USD 250,000 to purchase, transport, and install; US Military Group (MILGROUP) will be providing training on the chamber to Health Ministry medical specialists and Honduran Navy specialists based in Gracias a Dios.

Honduran media visited the hyperbaric chamber clinic, resulting in highly positive coverage.

The American Corner

¶4. U.S. Embassy Honduras' Public Affairs Section established this library with internet capability in 2005. Located at a local school, it was fully operational for about 18 months, but electricity and internet costs have made it difficult to operate of late. During the Ambassador's visit, the MoH expressed his intention to see if the Hondutel Telephone Company would provide internet services to the library and explore solutions to the electricity problem.

Relief Supplies

¶5. At the above location, the Ambassador had an opportunity to view approximately USD 40,000 in relief supplies purchased by the MILGROUP using SOUTHCOM HAP funds. The food, medicine and bedding are part of a mission-wide effort to assist communities affected by a series of storms and subsequent floods in October and November. The majority of these provisions will be moved via small boats across the department of Gracias a Dios since there are few roads connecting these communities. Journalists had the opportunity to see for themselves how vulnerable the population in La Mosquitia is and were able to show their audiences the kind of support that this region urgently needs.

TEGUCIGALP 00001063 002 OF 002

Counter Drug-Funded Naval Base Construction

¶5. The Ambassador, MoH & VMOE visited Barra de Caratasca Base to gain an appreciation for the mission and challenges of this Honduran naval base. This portion of the trip was made without the Media. The MILGROUP, working with SOUTHCOM and the Army Corps of Engineers has secured USD 2.2 million in counter-drug funding to build barracks and upgrade the pier to support counter-trafficking operations, (NOTE: The project has a July '09 estimated completion date. End note)

¶6. COMMENT: Gracias a Dios is a strategically important area for Honduras and for the region. Its vast, largely uncontrolled land and littoral areas are host to considerable illegal trafficking activities. This visit underscored the importance to Hondurans and the GOH that the USG places on the Gracias a Dios region as well as our partnership with the government and people of Honduras in the fight against illegal trafficking and the promotion of the health and education of its citizens. End comment.

Llorens